AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning

Introduction

Sara Rimm-Kaufman, PhD, UVA

Improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for students' academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers will not produce gains in achievement *(see high quality academic instruction)*. However, those students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflictual relationships. If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, experiences frequent communication with a teacher, and receives more guidance and praise than criticism from the teacher, then the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented, display better classroom behavior, and achieve at higher levels academically. Positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn (given that the content material of the class is engaging and age appropriate).

Example: What do good teacher-student relationships look like and why do these relationships matter?

Teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional and academic needs. Here are some concrete examples of closeness between a teacher and a student: 1) A seven-year-old girl who is experiencing divorce at home goes to her former first grade teacher in the mornings for a hug of encouragement, even though she is now in the second grade; 2) A fourth grade boy who is struggling in math shows comfort in admitting to his teacher that he needs help with multiplying and dividing fractions; 3) A middle school girl experiences bullying from other students and approaches her social studies teacher to discuss it because she trusts that the teacher will listen and help without making her feel socially inept.

Example: What do positive teacher-student relationships look and feel like in the classroom?

High Quality Academic Instruction

High quality academic instruction refers to instruction that is appropriate to students' educational levels, creates opportunity for thinking and analysis, uses feedback effectively to guide students' thinking, and extends students' prior knowledge. (Praise and Assessment, Motivating to Learn, Critical Thinking)

The Contribution of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on School Adjustment and Academic and Social Performance

Positive teacher-student relationships -- evidenced by teachers' reports of low conflict, a high degree of closeness and support, and little dependency -- have been shown to support students' adjustment to school, contribute to their social skills, promote academic performance, and foster students' resiliency in academic performance (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Teachers who experience close relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, appeared more self-directed, more cooperative, and more engaged in learning (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004). Students reported liking school more and experiencing less loneliness if they had a close relationship with their teachers. Students with better teacher-student relationships also showed better performance on measures of academic performance and school readiness (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Teachers who use more learner-centered practices (i.e., practices that show sensitivity to individual differences among students, include students in the decision-making, and acknowledge students' developmental,

personal and relational needs) produced greater motivation in their students than those who used fewer of such practices (Daniels & Perry, 2003; Perry & Weinstein, 1998).

The quality of early teacher-student relationships has a long-lasting impact. Specifically, students who had more conflict with their teachers or showed more dependency toward their teachers in kindergarten also had lower academic achievement (as reflected in mathematics and language arts grades) and more behavioral problems (e.g., poorer work habits, more discipline problems) through the eighth grade. These findings were evident even after taking into consideration (statistically) the extent to which students' behavior problems related to problematic teacher-child relationships. These findings were greater for boys than for girls (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Further work describes that children with more closeness and less conflict with teachers developed better social skills as they approached the middle school years than those with more conflictual relationships in kindergarten (Berry & O'Connor, 2009).

What do positive student-teacher relationships look like in the classroom?

- Teachers show their pleasure and enjoyment of students.
- Teachers interact in a responsive and respectful manner.
- Teachers offer students help (e.g., answering questions in timely manner, offering support that matches the children's needs) in achieving academic and social objectives.
- Teachers help students reflect on their thinking and learning skills.
- Teachers know and demonstrate knowledge about individual students' backgrounds, interests, emotional strengths and academic levels.
- Teachers seldom show irritability or aggravation toward students.

Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Make an effort to *get to know each student* in your classroom. Always call them by their names and strive to understand what they need to succeed in school (Croninger & Lee, 2001).
- Make an effort to *spend time individually* with each student, especially those who are difficult or shy. This will help you create a more positive relationship with them (Pianta, 1999; Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, Justice, & Pence, 2006).
- Be aware of the *explicit and implicit messages* you are giving to your students (Pianta, et al., 2001; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2002). Be careful to show your students that you want them to do well in school through both actions and words.
- *Create a positive climate* in your classroom by focusing not only on improving your relationships with your students, but also on enhancing the relationships among your students (Charney, 2002; Donahue, Perry & Weinstein, 2003).

Don't:

- Don't assume that being kind and respectful to students is enough to bolster their achievement. *Ideal classrooms have more than a single goal:* in ideal classrooms, teachers hold their students to appropriately high standards of academic performance and offer students an opportunity for an emotional connection to their teachers, their fellow students, and the school (e.g., Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; McCombs, 2001).
- Don't give up too quickly on your efforts to develop positive *relationships with difficult students*. These students will benefit from a good teacher-student relationship as much or more than their easier-to-get-along-with peers (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1998). Don't assume that *respectful and sensitive interactions* are only important to elementary school students. Middle and high school students benefit from such relationships as well (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Meece, Herman, & McCombs, 2003; Wentzel, 2002).
- Don't assume that relationships are inconsequential. Some research suggests that preschool children who have a lot of conflict with their teachers show increases in stress hormones when they interact with these teachers (Lisonbee, Mize, Payne, & Granger, 2008).

Importance of Knowing Students

Knowing a student's interests can help you create examples to match those interests. If a student who loves

basketball comes to you with a question about a mathematics problem, you might respond to him or her with a problem involving basketball. This type of specific responding shows that you care about him or her.

Likewise, knowing a student's temperament can help you craft appropriate learning opportunities. If a girl in your class is particularly distractible, you can support her efforts to concentrate by offering her a quieter area in which to work.

Positive Discourse with Students
Think about what you say to the difficult students in your classroom. Are you constantly bombarding them with requests to do something or telling them to stop doing what they are doing? No one likes being badgered and pestered, and your students are no exception. Instead, you should find a time or place when you can have positive discussion with the problem student.

Note that near the end of this video clip, the teacher redirects the attention of a young boy in a red shirt. She does this in a way that is physical and direct, yet demonstrates her sensitivity toward the child.

Giving Students Meaningful Feedback
Are you giving students meaningful feedback that says you care about them and their learning, or are you constantly telling your students to hurry? In your conversations, are you focusing on what your students have accomplished or are you concentrating your comments on what they have not yet mastered? Do your body positions, facial expressions, and tone of voice show your students that you are interested in them as people? Are you telling them to do one thing, yet you model quite different behavior? For example, are you telling your students to listen to each other, but then look bored when one of them talks to the class? Be sure that the feedback you give to your students conveys the message that you are supporting their learning and that you care about them.

Create a Positive Climate
Be sure to allow time for your students to link the concepts and skills they are learning to their own experiences. Build fun into the things you do in your classroom. In other words, plan activities that create a sense of community so that your students have an opportunity to see the connections between what they already know and the new things they are learning, as well as have the time to enjoy being with you and the other students.

Ideal Classrooms Have Complementary Goals
Here is a *video clip* of an eight year old boy talking about how a teacher's high expectations motivated him to do his homework, even though he was tired after a busy day at school.

Relationships with Difficult Students
Difficult students require more energy on your part. For example, you may need to spend time with them individually to get to know them better -- to understand their interests and what motivates them. This will not only allow you to tailor your instruction to their interests and motivation, but the time spent will also allow them to develop trust in you. Recent research on high school students who have frequent and intense discipline problems shows that when adolescents perceive that their teachers are trustworthy people, they show less defiant behavior (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Respectful and Sensitive Interactions
Supportive teacher-student relationships are just as important to middle and high school students as they are to elementary students. Positive relationships encourage students' motivation and engagement in learning. Older students need to feel that their teachers respect their opinions and interests just as much as younger students do.

Explanation and Evidence

Two theoretical perspectives -- Attachment Theory and Self-System Theory -- help to explain why children behave in certain ways in your classroom and how you can use your relationships with them to enhance their learning.

Attachment theory explains how students use their positive relationships with adults to organize their experiences (Bowlby 1969). Central to this theory is that students with close relationships with their teachers view their teacher as a "secure base" from which to explore the classroom environment. In practice, students with this "secure base" feel safe when making mistakes and feel more comfortable accepting the academic challenges necessary for learning.

Self-System theory emphasizes the importance of students' motivation and by doing so, explains the importance of teacher-child relationships (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Harter, in press; McCombs, 1986). Students come to the classroom with three basic psychological needs—competence, autonomy and relatedness—all of which can be met in a classroom through students' interactions with teachers and with the learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002). (See *competence* for definitions.) Positive teacher-student relationships help students meet these needs. Teachers offer feedback to students to support their feelings of competence. Teachers who know their students' interests and preferences and show regard and respect for these individual differences bolster students' feelings of autonomy (see the module on *autonomous learners*). Teachers who establish a personal and caring relationship and foster positive social interactions within their classrooms meet their students' needs for relatedness (or social connection to school). Taken together, effective teacher-student relationships confirm to students that teachers care for them and support their academic efforts.

Competence
Competence refers to a student's need to feel capable of academic work; autonomy suggests a feeling that he or she has some choice and ability to make decisions; and relatedness implies that a student feels socially connected to teachers or peers. Classroom practices that foster the feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness are likely to produce the engagement and motivation required for academic learning and success.

FAQ

The students in my school have severe emotional and behavioral problems and my school has few economic resources—can good relationships really help?
Teacher-student relationships contribute to students' resiliency. Often, we assume that hard-to-change factors such as class size, teacher experience, or availability of instructional supplies are crucial for predicting student achievement. In fact, these factors are not as important as positive relationships. In one study of almost 4,000 poor and minority children, the presence of positive relationships with teachers and the experience of a positive and orderly school environment in elementary and middle school were strong predictors of gains in math outcomes—much stronger than class size, teacher experience, or availability of instructional supplies. In another study, urban high school students with behavior and emotional problems were assigned to an intervention involving weekly interactions with teachers, monthly calls to the students at home, and increased praise from adults. Those students involved in the intervention showed higher grade point averages over the five-month intervention period compared to their peers who were not receiving the intervention (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Studies like this point to an important message: across ages and in virtually all classrooms, students will be more engaged and motivated if teachers meet students' essential need for social connection.

How does the importance of the teacher-student relationship compare to other important relationships, such as parent-student relationships, in students' lives?
From early childhood through adolescence, positive teacher-student relationships appear to complement the other important relationships in students' lives. For young students, family relationships are more important than teacher-student relationships in predicting students' adjustment to kindergarten (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). In middle school students, the perception of their teacher (whether they felt that their teacher was supportive toward them or not) predicted students' interest in learning and their engagement in the classroom. At this level, parental support plays a complementary role by predicting youths' motivation in school (Wentzel, 1998). In high school, both parent and teacher supportiveness (combined with parent

and teacher monitoring and high expectations) play critical roles in predicting gains in mathematics achievement (Gregory & Weinstein, 2004).

What are the factors contributing to positive teacher-student relationships?
Teacher-student relationships are determined by more than one factor: teacher characteristics and student *characteristics* each play an important role in predicting the quality of interactions that teachers have with individual students. Although less well- studied, other factors (school social climate, school policies, etc.) also contribute to the quality of these relationships.

Will more positive teacher-student relationships improve the peer relationships in my classroom?
Yes, positive teacher-student relationships can promote improved peer relationships in your classrooms through direct and indirect approaches. Teachers can directly promote positive social behaviors by orchestrating the relationships within a classroom in a positive manner (Battistich et al., 2004). Teachers can use positive teacher-student relationships indirectly to promote peer relationships as well. Students tend to be more accepting of peers who show engagement in the tasks of school (e.g., show attention, participate in classroom activities), and positive teacher-student relationships enhance students' engagement. Positive teacher-student relationships improve student-to-student acceptance in both current and future years (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

Are positive teacher-student relationships easier to form in some situations than others?
Some situations (such as the elementary school where each teacher is assigned only twenty or so students) provide more opportunities for the development of close teacher-student relationships. Other situations (such as the middle school or high school where teachers routinely provide instruction to four or five groups of twenty-five or more students) make it difficult to form positive teacher-student relationships with all students (Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988; Meece et al., 2003), and thus, it takes more effort. It is also easier to focus attention on positive teacher-student relationships in schools where the administrators believe that trust and positive relationships are important for improving children's performance (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

If teacher-student relationships reflect both characteristics of the teachers and characteristics of the student, how stable are these relationships over time?
The quality of teacher-student relationships is surprisingly stable over time. In other words, if a kindergarten teacher has a conflictual relationship with a student, it is likely that the child's first and second grade teachers will also experience conflict in their relationship with that same child. This stability is more evident when the relationships are conflictual rather than when the relationships are described as close or dependent (Howes, Phillepsen & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Most likely, the stability stems from the "internal working model" that students create in their mind about how relationships with adults typically ought to work.

Are there any unintended consequences associated with creating positive teacher-student relationships?
Ideally, classroom environments need to be nurturing while at the same time holding students to high academic standards. Classrooms that focus on nurturance without offering opportunities for academic learning do not produce increases in students' achievement (Lee & Smith, 1999).

Do positive teacher-student relationships work for all school subjects?
Positive teacher-student relationships play an equally important role in students' success across all subjects (McCombs & Miller, 2006). Students' social and emotional needs are present throughout the day and the year, regardless of the subject being taught.

How do you evaluate teacher-student relationships?
Several common and readily available instruments have been developed to assess teacher-student relationships. Although used primarily for research, these instruments can also serve as diagnostic tools to identify strengths and weakness in your own teaching. Some of these instruments rely on teacher reports of relationships, others are observationally-based measures of teacher-student interactions in the classroom, and yet others rely on students' reports of their relationships with teachers. One particularly innovative

technique to use with young children relies on children's drawings of their teachers. For a description of these measures, see *Measures of Teacher-Student Relationships*.

There are less formal ways to assess your relationships with children. If you have a particular child with whom you have had a challenging relationship, you might invite a school psychologist into your classroom to observe your interactions, take notes, and reflect with you about the child. Alternatively, you can set up a video camera and critique your own interactions with the student who is causing you difficulty. Another strategy is to directly ask your students. You can give them anonymous questionnaires or ask small groups of students about how they feel while they are in your classroom. Through this process, it is important to realize that even the best teachers have difficulties with a few students from time to time. The reasons for these difficulties are numerous and getting help from a collaborating teacher, the school psychologist, or a supportive administrator may offer you an outside view of what is occurring and help you improve your relationships with the challenging students in your classroom.

Are positive teacher-child relationships a "magic bullet"?
No, positive teacher-student relationships are only one part of a teachers' repertoire of classroom management and discipline strategies. High quality relationships only complement other aspects of classroom management. Furthermore, it is not possible to develop positive relationships with every student. As a teacher, you can strive toward accomplishing that goal but realize that having an ideal relationship with each student may be unobtainable.

How are positive teacher-student relationships linked to classroom climate?
Improving teacher-student relationships constitutes only a first step toward creating a classroom community that is conducive to children's social and academic development. For more information, see *Teacher-Student Relationships & Classroom Climate*.

Several student characteristics are risk factors for problematic relationships.

- Boys typically have more conflict and less closeness in their relationships with teachers than girls (Baker, 2006; Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Howes et al., 2000; Hughes, Cavell, & Wilson, 2001).
- Students with more internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) show greater dependency on their teachers than their average counterparts (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004), whereas students with more externalizing problems (e.g., aggression, problem behaviors) show more conflict with teachers (Murray & Murray, 2004).
- Students with problematic relationships with family members tend to have poorer quality relationships with their teachers (O'Connor & McCartney, 2006).
- Students who exhibit more problem behaviors at home and school tend to develop more conflictual and less close relationships with their teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Murray & Murray, 2004).
- Students with emotional disturbances or mild mental retardation have more negative relationships with teachers than students without these problems (Murray & Greenberg, 2001).
- Bold preschool students with poorly developed language skills are perceived by their teachers as having more conflictual relationships. Shy preschool students with better language skills are perceived by their teachers as more dependent upon them (Rudasill et al., 2006).
- For students at risk for problematic teacher-student relationships, teachers needed to make extra efforts to offer the social and emotional support likely to help them meet the challenges they face in school.

Teachers vary in their ability to create positive teacher-student relationships. Some teachers simply have an easier time developing positive relationships with students—personality, feelings toward students, their own relationship histories may all play a role. A few personal characteristics of teachers have been identified as important predictors of positive teacher-student relationships in elementary schools. Research has found that preschool and kindergarten teachers are more likely to develop close relationships with students who share their same ethnic background Likewise, it was found that Caucasian pre-service teachers working in their 10-week field placement sites perceived African American and Hispanic students

as more dependent than these same teachers perceived White students. Asian American and Hispanic pre-service teachers perceived African American students as more dependent upon them as compared to Asian American or Hispanic students (Kesner, 2000). Pre-service teachers who recall their own upbringing as caring and nurturing were also more likely to experience closeness with the students in their field placement classrooms (Kesner, 2000). Teachers' beliefs and the types of practices that teachers prefer appear to also be important. Kindergarten teachers who use fewer didactic and more age-appropriate, student-centered teaching practices reported less conflictual relationships with their kindergarten students (Manticopoulous, 2005). Much less is known about the teacher characteristics that contribute to positive teacher-student relationships at the middle and high school level.

Measures of Teacher-Student Relationships

One teacher-report instrument, designed for elementary school teachers, is the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS); Pianta, 2001). This instrument measures a teacher's perception of conflict, closeness, and dependency with a specific child. Another instrument, designed for teachers of middle and high school, is the Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI) Ang, 2005). It measures teachers' satisfaction with their students, the help they perceive they are offering to their students, and their level of conflict with their students.

The presence of supportive relationships can be measured in the classroom using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2006). This system measures teachers' sensitivity as well as positive and negative climate in the classroom. Different forms of this instrument can be used for preschool through twelfth grade.

Students' reports of their relationships with teachers can be assessed in young children with the *Feelings about School* instrument (Valeski & Stipek, 2001) or by having a child draw a picture of him/herself and his/her teacher at school and analyzing the picture for signs of negativity (Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007). In elementary school, students can be assessed with the *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire for Young Children* (Cassidy & Asher, 1992); in middle school with the *Teacher Treatment Inventory* (Weinstein & Marshall, 1984); and in high school students with an adapted measure of perceived social connection.

Another set of validated instruments designed for teachers and students are the *Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices* (ALCP) surveys. These surveys, each designed for a different age group (grades K-3, 4-8, and 9-12), provide teachers with tools for self-assessment and reflection (McCombs, 2004). The emphasis of this work has been to identify discrepancies between teacher and student perceptions in order to assist teachers as they reflect upon and change their practices (McCombs & Miller, 2006). The ALCP process focuses on student learning and motivational outcomes, as well as the classroom practices that contribute most to maximizing these outcomes.

Teacher-Student Relationships & Classroom Climate

When first grade teachers use practices that demonstrate caring toward students and practices that foster interpersonal skills among students, students are less likely to reject one another (Donahue et al, 2003). Also, aggressive students who have positive relationships with teachers are more likely to be accepted by peers than aggressive students who lack positive relationships with their teachers (Hughes, Cavell et al., 2001). Ultimately, constructive teacher-student relationships have an important positive influence on the social skills of difficult as well as typical students (Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Weissberg, 2000). Such findings suggest that enhancing individual teacher-student relationships has beneficial and cumulative effects for other aspects of classroom life.

Improving teacher-student relationships is only the first step toward meeting students' emotional and relational needs. A teacher should also work on producing a caring community of learners. Such efforts improve the nature of interactions among students and promote students' engagement in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; McCombs, 2004; Meece, 2003; Meece et al., 2003; Weinberger & McCombs, 2003).

Studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of interventions designed to create more caring school and classroom communities; each has resulted in specific recommendations for improving teacher-

student relationships as well as peer-relationships. One such intervention is the Child Development Project (CDP). It focuses on fostering caring peer relationships, including students in decision-making, and teaching students to better understand the feelings, needs, and perspectives of others. The goal of CDP is to promote positive development among children and build upon their strengths. Students exposed to this intervention feel more positive about school and are more motivated (e.g., showed more task orientation and greater intrinsic motivation) than their counterparts not receiving this intervention in elementary school (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). Likewise, CDP appears to have some long-lasting effects; students enrolled in the CDP elementary schools were less antisocial and more prosocial in middle school as well (Battistich et al., 2004). Further, in a district that pressed for high achievement, CDP was linked to positive effects on achievement outcomes as well as gains in socioemotional skills For more information, visit Developmental Studies Center's Child Development Project.

Another example is the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach. This is a classroom-based intervention designed to integrate social and academic learning. When RC was examined to determine whether there were links between the use of its approach and the quality of teacher-student relationships, it was found that teachers using more RC practices had closer relationships with students in their classrooms (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Visit Responsive Classroom to learn more.

For Whom the Strategy Work and Under What Conditions?

What are the developmental differences associated with teacher-child relationships? Teacher-student relationships are as important to adolescents as they are to younger students. Feeling a connection and sense of relatedness to a teacher represents an essential need of all children and teens (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). However, it is worth noting that the nature of positive teacher-student relationships changes depending on the age of the child involved. In other words, the precise behaviors that might be perceived by a kindergarten child as nurturing and caring (e.g., a doting smile, a one-armed hug) might be perceived by adolescents as over-involved and cloying. It is also important to realize that in the early years of school, students' perception of their relationship with teachers and teachers' perception of those same relationships are quite similar. As children grow and develop, the gap between their perceptions of teachers and teachers' perception of them grows and widens (McCombs & Miller, 2006).

Students experience stressors as they grow and develop. Positive, healthy relationships can help children with the developmental transitions they experience.

Do good teacher-student relationships work better for some students than others?
Teacher-student relationships are important to virtually all students. However, high quality teacher-student relationships appear to be most significant for children who are "at risk" for school failure (Baker, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2002). In one study, high quality teacher-student relationships appeared to be better predictors of classroom adjustment, social skills, and reading performance for children showing initial externalizing problems (e.g., aggression, hyperactivity), internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depression) and learning problems (e.g., attention problems) (Baker, 2006) than for children without these initial risk factors.

In another study, sensitive and supportive relationships proved to be more important in predicting more self-reliant behavior and less off task, negative and aggressive behaviors in the kindergarten classroom for bold, outgoing children. (Comparable levels of sensitivity and support of the teacher played less of a role in children's classroom behavior for shy, hesitant children [Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2002). Teacher sensitivity and emotional supportiveness played a greater role in predicting children's academic achievement gains in first grade (after taking into consideration children's earlier achievement) for children "at risk" for school failure than for those without these risk factors (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

In another study, poor teacher-child relationships were correlated with an achievement gap. When Hughes and Kwok (2007) studied a group of low achieving readers, they found that first grade children who had poorer relationships with their teachers were less engaged in school and had lower academic achievement in second grade. It is very important to note that Hughes and Kwok found that African American children

had poorer relationships with their teachers than children of other ethnic backgrounds (i.e., Caucasian, Hispanic). This suggests how important it is for teachers to develop the best possible relationship with all children, regardless of their ethnic background. Taken together, such findings suggest that high quality teacher-child relationships can partially compensate for disadvantages in other facets of students' social-emotional lives.

High quality teacher-student relationships are equally important for all students, regardless of ***ethnicity***. Students are more likely to experience positive relationships with teachers who share their ethnicity. However, other factors beside ethnicity (e.g., the teachers' skills in creating good relationships, the child's tendency toward behavior problems) are probably more important than ethnicity in predicting the quality of teacher-student relationships.

Student Stressors
Positive teacher-student relationships can offset some of the normal stressors that students experience as they grow and develop. For example, the transition to middle school is often viewed as a stressful time for children; middle school students often show declines in motivation, self-esteem and academic performance (Feldlaufer et al., 1988). However, students who perceive greater support from their teachers experience less depression and have more growth in self-esteem between the sixth and eighth grades (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Also, students who perceive their teachers as respectful, eager to support their autonomy, focused on setting realistic and individualized expectations for performance, and offering nurturing and constructive feedback are more motivated in school (Wentzel, 1998). More specifically, if a student believes "my teacher trusts me" or "my teacher calls on me to give the answer," he or she is more likely to be interested in class, more likely to conform to the positive social norms of the classroom, and more eager to master the academic material being taught (Wentzel, 1998; 2002).

Ethnicity
Several themes emerge in relation to the study of teacher-child relationships among ethnic minority children. First, it is worth noting that virtually all peer-reviewed studies on teacher-child relationships included students who are ethnic minorities in their samples, and many included only ethnic minority students. Such studies have found that high quality teacher-student relationships are important for all children (e.g., Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Second, students are more likely to experience positive relationships with teachers who share their ethnicity (Saft & Pianta, 2001). Although this finding is evident in the research literature, the magnitude of its effect is very small, suggesting that other factors beside ethnicity are more important in predicting the quality of teacher-child relationships. Third, there is a "folk wisdom" that some children, particularly African American children, will not respond well to the outwardly warm, nurturing, and supportive behaviors typical in classrooms led by White teachers. This idea is often espoused in books and articles, however there are no data to support this assertion.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Several books designed for teachers may be useful in promoting teacher-student relationships. Most of these books address the needs of children in early and middle childhood:

Charney, R. (2002). *Teaching children to care: Classroom management for ethical and academic growth, K-8*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.
Available at: Responsive Classroom
Howes, C. & Ritchie, S. (2002). *A matter of trust: Connecting teachers and learners in the early childhood classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
Available at: Teacher College Press

Pianta, R. C. (1999). Enhancing relationships between children and teachers. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
Available at: Enhancing Relationships Between Children and Teachers

References

Ang, R. P. (2005). Development and validation of the teacher-student relationship inventory using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 71*(1), 55-74.

Baker, J. A. (2006). Contributions of teacher-child relationships to positive school adjustment during elementary school. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*, 211- 229.

Battistich, V., Schaps, E., & Wilson, N. (2004). Effects of an elementary school intervention on students' "connectedness" to school and social adjustment during middle school. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 24*(3), 243-262.

Berry, D., & O'Connor, E. (2009). Behavioral risk, teacher–child relationships, and social skill development across middle childhood: A child-by-environment analysis of change. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31*(1), 1-14.

Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1997). The teacher-child relationship and early school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology, 55*(1), 61-79.

Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1998). Children's interpersonal behaviors and the teacher-child relationship. *Developmental Psychology, 34*(5), 934-946.

Blankemeyer, M., Flannery, D. J., & Vazsonyi, A. T. (2002). The role of aggression and social competence in children's perceptions of the child-teacher relationship. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(3), 293-303.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Volume 1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Publications.

Cassidy, J. & Asher, S.R. (1992). Loneliness and peer relations in young children. *Child Development, 63*, 350-365.

Croninger, R. G., & Lee, V. E. (2001). Social capital and dropping out of high school: Benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *Teacher College Record, 103*(4), 548-581.

Daniels, D. H., & Perry, K. E. (2003). "Learner-centered" according to children. *Theory Into Practice, 42*(2), 102-108.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3-33). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Donohue, K. M., Perry, K. E., & Weinstein, R. S. (2003). Teachers' classroom practices and children's rejection by their peers. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 24*, 91-118.

Feldlaufer, H., Midgley, C. & Eccles, J. S. (1988). Student, teacher, and observer perceptions of the classroom environment before and after the transition to junior high school. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 8*(2), 133-156.

Gregory, A., & Ripski, M. (2008). Adolescent trust in teachers: Implications for behavior in the high school classroom. *School Psychology Review, 37*(3), 337-353.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development, 72*, 625-638.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure? *Child Development, 76*(5), 949-967.

Harrison, L. J., Clarke, L., & Ungerer, J. A. (2007). Children's drawings provide a new perspective on teacher-child relationship quality and school adjustment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 22*, 55-71.

Harter, S. (in press). *The cognitive and social construction of the developing self*. New York: Guilford Press.

Henriccson, L., & Rydell, A. (2004). Elementary school children with behavior problems: Teacher-child relations and self-perception. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 50*(2), 111-138.

Howes, C., Phillipsen, L. C., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2000). The consistency of perceived teacher-child relationships between preschool and kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology, 58*(2), 115-132.

Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T. A., & Wilson, V. (2001). Further support for the developmental significance of the quality of the teacher-student relationship. *Journal of School Psychology, 39*(4), 289-301.

Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships on lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. Journal *of Educational Psychology, 99*(1), 39-51.

Kesner, J. E. (2000). Teacher characteristics and the quality of child-teacher relationships. *Journal of School Psychology, 28*(2), 135-149.
Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 262-273.
Lee, V., & Smith, J. B. (1999). Social support and achievement for young adolescents in Chicago: The role of school academic press. *American Educational Research Journal, 36*(4), 907-945.
Lisonbee, J., Mize, J., Payne, A. L., & Granger, D. (2008). Children's cortisol and the quality of teacher-child relationships in child care. *Child Development, 79*(6), 1818-1832.
Manticopoulos, P. (2005). Conflictual relationships between kindergarten children and their teachers: Associations with child and classroom context variables. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*, 425-442.
McCombs, B. L. (1986). The role of the self-system in self-regulated learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11*, 314-332.
McCombs, B. L. (2001). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: A phenomenological view. In B. J. Zimmerman & D. H. Schunk (Eds.), *Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 67-123) (2nd. Ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
McCombs, B. L. (2004). The learner-centered psychological principles: A framework for balancing a focus on academic achievement with a focus on social and emotional learning needs. In E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 23-39). New York: Teachers College Press.
McCombs, B. L., & Miller, L. (2006). *The journey to learner-centered practices: A series for teachers and administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
Meece, J. L. (2003). Applying learner-centered principles to middle school education. *Theory into Practice, 42*, 109-116.
Meece, J. L., Herman, P., & McCombs, B. L. (2003). Relations of learner-centered teaching practices to adolescents' achievement goals. *International Journal of Educational Research, 39*(4-5), 457-475.
Murray, C., & Greenberg, M. T. (2001). Relationships with teachers and bonds with school: Social and emotional adjustment correlates for children with and without disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*(1), 25-41.
Murray. C., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Implementing a teacher-student relationship program in a high-poverty urban school: Effects on social, emotional and academic adjustment and lessons learned. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(2), 137-152.
Murray, C., & Murray, K. M. (2004). Child level correlates of teacher-student relationships: An examination of demographic characteristics, academic orientations, and behavioral orientations. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(7), 751-762.
O'Connor, E., & McCartney, K. (2006). Testing associations between young children's relationships with mothers and teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 87-98.
Perry, K. E., & Weinstein, R. S. (1998). The social context of early schooling and children's school adjustment. *Educational Psychologist, 33*(4), 177-194.
Pianta, R.C., La Paro, K.,& Hamre, B. (2006). *CLASS: Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual: K-3 Version*. Charlottesville, VA: Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.
Pianta, R. C., Nimetz, S. L., & Bennett, E. (1997). Mother-child relationships, teacher-child relationships, and school outcomes in preschool and kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12*, 263-280.
Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. W. (2004). Teacher-child relationships and children's success in the first years of school. *School Psychology Review, 33*(3), 444-458.
Reddy, R., Rhodes, J. E., & Mulhall, P. (2003). The influence of teacher support on student adjustment in the middle school years: A latent growth curve study. *Development and Psychopathology, 15*, 119-138.
Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Chiu, Y. I. (2007). Promoting social and academic competence in the classroom: An intervention study examining the contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach. *Psychology in the Schools, 44*(4), 397-413.
Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Early, D., Cox, M., Saluja, G., Pianta, R., Bradley, R. et al. (2002). Early behavioral attributes and teachers' sensitivity as predictors of competent behavior in the kindergarten classroom. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 23*, 451-470.
Rudasill, K. M., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Justice, L. M., & Pence, K. (2006). Temperament and language skills as predictors of teacher-child relationship quality in preschool. *Early Education and Development, 17*(2), 271-291.

Saft, E.W. & Pianta, R.C. (2001).Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students: Effects of child, age, gender and ethnicity of teachers and children. *School Psychology Quarterly, 16*, 125-141.
Solomon, D., Battistich, V., Watson, M., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2000). A six district study of educational change: Direct and mediated effects of the Child Development Project. *Social Psychology of Education, 4*, 3-51.
Valeski, T.N. & Stipek, D.J. (2001). Young children's feelings about school. *Child Development, 72*, 1198-1213.
Weinberger, E., & McCombs, B. L. (2003). Applying the LCPs to high school education. *Theory into Practice, 42*(2), 117-126.
Weinstein, R., & Marshall, H. H. (1984). *Ecology of students' achievement expectations*. Final report to the National Institute of Education. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.
Wentzel, K. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*, 411-419.
Wentzel, K. (2002). Are effective teachers like good parents? Teaching styles and student adjustment in early adolescence. *Child Development, 73*, 287-301.
Zins, J. E., Elias, M. J., Greenberg, M. T., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Promoting social and emotional competence in children. In K. M. Minke & G. G. Bear (Eds.), *Preventing school problems – promoting school success: Strategies and programs that work* (pp. 71-99). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* New York: Teachers College Press.